

THE TREATMENT OF ANTI-COLONIAL NATIONALISM IN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The research paper is an attempt to explore the range, perspectives and characteristics of the concept of anticolonial nationalism and its relation with literature with particular reference to Indian fiction in English. However, it is not so easy to encompass the enormous field of anticolonial nationalism yet an attempt is made to comprehend and examine the discourse of the concept that has permanent impact on the lives of people and in the field of literature direct and indirect. It is an attempt to define the narratives of anticolonial nationalism and its involvement with literature theoretically. Nationalisms have evolved in several ways all over the world. Territory, language, religion, ethnicity, race and history have all combined in larger context of modernism and progressive democracy and worked towards the emergence of the discourses of anticolonial nationalisms. Indian writings in English have critiqued nation and nationalism and at the same times they have given voice to repressed and peripheral nationalisms during the anticolonial struggle. It was because of anticolonial struggle that the multi-lingual, multi-religion and multi-regional character of the national movement arose out of the objectively perceptible historical character of India.

KEYWORDS: Anticolonial, Nationalism, Indian Writing in English, Struggle, Discourse

INTRODUCTION

In the era of anticolonial struggle, there had been an increasing engagement with the ideas connected with nation and nationalism in fiction. This paper aims at studying and analyzing the focus of the major Indian writers in English on the question of anticolonial nationalism and identity. The attempt will be made to examine the position taken by the writers in their writings. These writings depicted the dominant themes of nationalist struggle apart from their civilizational, cultural and historical antecedents. Territory, language, religion, ethnicity, race and history have all combined in larger context of modernism and progressive democracy and worked towards the emergence of the discourses of anticolonial nationalisms. Specifically, in Indian anti-colonial nationalism which defined itself in opposition to colonial rule has also been creatively and critically assessed in Indian Literature.

The term anti-colonialism is defined as the politics or an ideology aimed at ending European colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth century in Asian and African countries. To some extent, it can be said that the Indian nationalist movement begins not as an anticolonial violent insurgency. In its early phases, it is an ideology of the indigenous bureaucracy of the *Raj*. Macaulay's education system started creating a class of interpreters between British and the millions whom they govern. The colonizers want to create a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect in the later part of nineteenth century. It was this class of interpreters who initiated and supported a nationalist movement which attempted to control the state bureaucracy.

The instinct of anticoloniality can be traced right from the beginning of Indian literature in English but the first text which has the spirit of anticolonial nationalism is *A Journey of Forty-Eight Hours of the year 1945* (1835) by Kylas Chunder Dutt. It is about the imaginary revolt against the British army by the Indians and is published in *Calcutta Literary Gazette* and *Saturday Evening Hurkaru*. It is one of the outstanding documents available in history that prior to the formation of Indian National Congress. From the early nineteenth century, Indian middle class has already been dreaming to come out from the British clutches but they were not sure about the form of struggle. Therefore, the writers in that era started creating their own heroes to lead the people against British rule.

The anticolonial nationalism openly came out in 1857 in the struggle against colonial East India Company. This struggle is seen by the different points of view. Most of the writers who belong to colonial regime represent the colonizer's perspective. They present Britishers as brave, broadminded and progressive. On the other hand they present Indians as cruel, savage, cynical and superstitious. However, after the struggle, the contemporary Indian writers in English did not represent the 1857 struggle from Indian perspective in their fiction because after the rebellion, India was directly under the control of British regime. Perhaps, the state did not allow them to do so. However, many Indian writers in vernaculars attempted to represent the real foundation to take off the freedom. Some of the British writers represent the event from Britisher's perspective in order to justify their rule in India. The objective of the British writers was to prove the justification of their civilizing mission and crush 1857 struggle. It is often criticized that Indian writings in English are not solely focused on Indian issues. Meenakshi Mukherjee argues that the center of power was English language and western culture, "Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, when nationalism had become a conspicuous strand of thought in most creative writers in the Indian languages, novelists in English continued to display obsequiousness towards the ruler at regular intervals." (109).

In her essay, Pamela Lothspeich draws our attention to the fact that more than eighty novels, besides a number of poems, plays and children's stories, were published between the 1860s and the World War I and that the "height of 'Mutiny fiction' was in the 1890s...when nineteen novels were published" (1). Among them, some are very prominent and popular. Katherine Bartrum's *A Widow's Reminiscences of the Siege of Lukhnow* (1858), Noah Alfred Chick's *Annals of the Indian Rebellion* (1859), William Stephen Raikes' *Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India* (1860), James Grant's *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of Indian Mutiny* (1868), Hafiz Allards Nirgis: *A Tale of Indian Mutiny and Bismallah or Happy Days in Cashmere* (1869), Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) and Mrs. Dunbar Douglas Muter's *My Recollections of the Sepoy Mutiny* (1857-58) (1911) etc. represent the Colonizers' point of view. Some of the British writers sympathise the demand of Indian people for Independence.

In later part of 20th century many writers revisit 1857 struggle in their fiction. The bulk of literature in the free India contains 1857 war as their subject matter, but couple of fiction need to be mentioned here to show how British was brute in their actions and they are snob in their narration. One is *The Last Mughal* (2006) written by William Dalrymple depicts the real face of imperialism by showing the cruelty of the Britisher's such as the killing of all of Zafar's sons and the destruction of cherished monuments in Delhi and other cities of India. Keeping in view the Indian perspectives some other novels like Qurratulain Hyder's *Rain of Fire* (1959), Khushwant Singh's *Delhi* (1990) and Vikrama Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) were written. They may not be regarded as novels of revolt, but the events of 1857-58 are important contents of the novels. Manohar Malgonkar's fictional Nana Sahib autobiography *The Devil's Wind* (1972) represent the rebellion of 1857. *The Devil's Wind* is a first person account given by the Nana of Bithoor about his life and his role in the revolt of 1857. The novel also depicts the atrocity and brutality of the colonial officers. Ruskin Bons's *A flight of Pigeons* (1978) looks at the events of 1857 both from the British and Indian point of view and discusses the

dichotomies of colonial relations. He tries to synthesis between two forces in 1857. Unfortunately, he very consciously keeps himself away from the concept of freedom and concept of colonialism. R. N. Rai also writes in his book *1857 and After Literary Representations*, “Remembering 1857 as the first war of Independence is quite relevant in the present era of globalization wherein neocolonial tactics are being employed by the bigger nations to control and subjugate the smaller and weaker nations of the world” (17).

Another an earlier Indian writer in English, Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1824-86) is a radical anticolonialist in his writings. He is a very versatile genius and a prolific writer. He is an essayist, poet, historian and novelist. His *Selections from Bengalinama* contains some of his most significant essays and short stories. His work *Shunkur* is the fictional representation of the resistance of 1857 against colonial power. It depicts the exploitative nature of some of the British officers like Bernard and Mackenzie who rape the women who has given them shelter. Subhendu Mund regards Dutt as the first major Indian writer in English who, through his fictional as well as non-fictional works, tried to recreate alternative histories in order to ‘write back’ to the British Empire. Dutt has categorically denounced the British occupation of India and through his important novel *Shunkur* has provided an alternative myth to justify Indians’ rebellion against the British Imperial Government.

Dutt’s another novel *The Young Zemindar* (1883) depicts the anticolonial feelings in various parts of India. The hero of the novel Manohar and his mentor Babajee Bissonath travelled across the country to understand the culture of resistance in the different part of India. Meenakshi Mukharjee opines that, “At the end of the novel, the young Zamindar, Manohar, accepts the British presence, grudgingly admitted that English rule, with all its drawbacks, is still better than what the Mahomedan rule was” (109).

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-94) greatly influenced the idea of Indian religious and secular nationalism through his writings. He uses religion as a powerful tool to rise the people against colonial rulers. Bankim asserted that the idea of western nationalism reinforced the spiritual values of Indian nationalism. His novel, *Anandamath (The Abbey of Bliss)* (1882) is set in the late 18th century and depicts the Sannyasi Rebellion. This novel inspires many people to sacrifice their lives for the struggle of Independence. The novel was banned by the British regime.

Another book in the same frame of ideas, Rabindranath Tagore *The Home and the World* expresses the various facet of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle in India against the colonial regime. The novel is set in 1905 colonial India and describes the particular context of partition of Bengal. There are three main characters Nikhil, Sandip and Bimla and they represent various aspect of nationalism from their own perspective. According to Nikhil, ultra-nationalism is exclusive and it is against the idea of equality. Sandip believes in aggressive nationalism and he wants to attain independence by every mean. Bimla, the wife of Nikhil is caught between the two approaches towards nationalism.

The theme of anticolonial nationalism is further represented in Tagore’s *Gora* (1909). It can be clearly observed that Tagore’s nationalism in *Gora* is also giving almost the same picture that let freedom moment should not ignore human quality in day today social life. The novel is set in Bengal where the skin colour of most of the people is dark. The protagonist of the novel is the believer of staunch Hinduism. His nationalistic sentiment was restricted to rituals, symbols and superstitions of Hindu religion. He believes that every Hindu should sacrifice his life for the attainment of freedom. When he comes to know about his Irish lineage and his identity as a Hindu rests questionable in the end of the novel. His ideas towards the concept of nationalism are badly shattered. He feels that he belongs to no one and nowhere and senses the feelings of rootlessness.

These novels represent the people's voice for the time when India was desperate to attain freedom from the colonial command. But in other writing of Tagore, he was highly critical to those who are eager and hungry to gain political power without taking the masses together, he also points out that they will definitely be disillusioned. The history proved it right. For the better understanding on nationalism, one can see *Ghare Bahre* and *Gora* as an outstanding document in India. In the freedom struggle the nationalists turned into power-hungry entities. They clearly became disillusioned and lost their focus on the real issues of the country. Tagore is radically critical about this extremist version of nationalism. This form of nationalism is a copy of western model of nationalism that is completely isolated from the social structure and need of the hour of the majority of Indian people. It is nothing to do with Indian masses, consciousness and Indian history. Tagore considers this type of sentiment only as an elite phenomena which is sectarian in nature and cannot attain freedom. So he was in the favour of a parochial and spiritual approach towards nationalism. Tagore points out that radical nationalist moment does not have conviction but only anesthetics with emotions, "the idea of Nation, one of the most powerful anesthetics that man has invented. Under the influence of its fumes, the people can carry out its systematic program of the most virulent self seeking without being in the least aware of its moral perversion (25-26)".

Therefore, Tagore suggested that the need of the hour is to worship the people of the country on humanitarian grounds instead of nation, "It is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity" (111). He opposed the ideas of the nationalism imitated from west.

K. S. Venkataramani (1891-1951) is well known for the Gandhian theme in his novels. *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927) is in the favour of Gandhian economic policies. Venkataramani's second novel *Kandan, The Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making* (1932) is about the civil disobedience movement of 1930s. In the novel, a young Oxford educated Kandan resigned from the prestigious ICS job to devote his whole time for the nationalistic cause.

KA Abbas's novel *Tomorrow is ours: A Novel of the India of Today* (1943) describes the issues of nationalism and untouchability through a female protagonist called Parvati. Bhabani Bhattacharya's (1906-88) *So Many Hungers* (1947) sets in the context of Bengal famine and Quit India Movement of 1942. His characters are deeply influenced by Gandhian philosophy. The main character of the novel is Kajoli, a village girl who emerges as a new and educated woman in Gandhian sense. She rejects the profession of prostitution forced by the circumstances on her. She begins to sell the newspaper in order to look after her family.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) started understanding the colonial conditions of India in 1921. He came into the influence of Gandhi and that's why he shifted himself from Bloomsbury to Sabarmati. His first novel *Untouchable* (1935) describes just one day of the life of Bakha. Anand's *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) are also the study of the oppressed downtrodden. Raja Rao's classic novel *Kanthapura* (1938) depicts the life of Moorthy in a simple village. He wishes to break the orthodox traditions of Indian people.

The writers in almost all the Indian languages and Indian Writings in English, particularly play major role in generating the anticolonial reactions during colonial era. The fiction written in response to colonial exploitative regime stirred the soul of the people of India. They created the longing for the freedom among the masses. They played important role in liberation from the chains of slavery. There are many poets, lyricists, novelists, essayists, orators and journalists who fearlessly write against the British government. However, all the writings are not traceable now, only small part of it, is available. To be precise, the anticolonial movement put into motion the process through which a transition to modern nationhood was sought to be made in India rather than the colonial occupation.

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